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THE WAR: A BRITISH VIEW

BY SIR OLIVER LODGE

WE live in great days, great and invigorating days; invigorating I call them, for England has discarded some frivolity and is risking everything in a noble battle for the right.

From one point of view we are waging war against a bullying system which has set itself to dominate the world; we are restraining a nation from placing its boot on the face of Europe, as I have good authority for saying a Prussian officer did to a wounded Englishman—a typical and unpardonable act. The European bully must be vanquished; that is one clear necessity.

From higher ground, however, the war is seen to be a war of ideals, a conflict between two ideals of government: the English ideal of a commonwealth of nations, a group of friendly States, some larger, some smaller, some stronger, some weaker, but all working together and contributing each her quota for the good of humanity and the progress of the world—that is the ideal on the one hand; and on the other, the Prussian ideal of a single glorified State, dominating all others, enforcing its will despotically, imposing its customs, its learning, and its culture on all the rest of the world. This ideal is that of a strong, resolute autocracy, ruling all Europe, not with the consent of the governed, but in spite of their remonstrance and ignoring their dislike; a government so strong as to be able to crush all opposition and to do away with all freedom except the freedom to do precisely as you are told; the replacement, in fact, of freedom by coercion. For Treitschke has taught, and his disciples thoroughly believe, that the greatness and good of the world is to be found in the predominance there of German culture, of the German mind, in a word, of the German character. His school looks for the establishment of a German world-empire in accordance with the motto, “World Power or Down-

fall"; and the subjugation of England is an essential preliminary. Toward the attainment of this ideal the German nation has made immense preparations; it has also made vast sacrifices; it will be a wonder if it has not sold its soul.

The years 1866 and 1870 were the fatal years of Prussian supremacy and success. Up to that time German art, German science, German history, were admired and envied throughout the world. It had gloried in the era of Goethe, of Beethoven, and of Helmholtz. Since that date the great men of Germany have been few; the decline then begun has continued. With some exceptions, no doubt, they have lost their faith in unselfish action; they disbelieve in chivalry; they deny any moral government of the world; they believe in the rule of the strongest.

In mechanism and apparatus the nation still ranks high; it has devoted itself to the design and construction of appliances, specially those which can be used in war. We are fighting a nation of machines. In war material it is unrivaled; in personnel it is lacking; its army is itself a machine.

To it we of the Allied Nations oppose Men, individual resource and character, the domination of personality—handicapped, I fear, by insufficient preparation.

Determination there is on both sides; for not in biological metaphor, but in dire reality, it is a struggle for existence. The two ideals are in the field against each other; one must emerge triumphant, the other must be defeated. There can be no halting between two opinions. It is a very ancient alternative—"If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." There can be no peace till the prophets of Baal are exterminated and the falseness of their creed displayed. Up and down, backward and forward, the fighting-line may surge, but there can be only one end. Of this we should be well assured while striving with all our might for its accomplishment. Toward this some are giving their lives or the lives of those dear to them; others are giving of their substance, and this without stint, for if the cause of God is not triumphant, life on this planet will be no longer worth living. Death is preferable to German rule of the kind we should experience if conquered and if the dormant national hate, fostered by lies and now fanned into a blaze, were set free on the vanquished. What has been done in Belgium would be done in England, and more, too. The Belgian homes are an object lesson, clearly displaying the character and consequences of the Prussian ideal. The ravages are due to

no isolated and accidental savagery; they were ordered as part of a consistent policy of terrorism and enslavement. The root of the policy being bad, the fruits are bad too.

Able Prussian writers seek to justify any and every unfair and barbarous act which may seem likely to promote their cause. It is a campaign of lying and spying, of intimidation and ruthless massacre of all who call their soul their own.

Yet I must assume that they are not consciously evil, only diabolically misguided. For they, too, have an ideal, I grant them that—one which has become deeply ingrained and has spread from Prussia to the rest of Germany, deceived as it has been, with the truth sedulously kept from it. There will be an awakening; and already there must be many thousands who have not bowed the knee to Baal, who long for freedom as we do, and who will in due time make their voices heard. Amid the glamor of apparent success they cannot speak, but when disasters come, when they can no longer be concealed, and the nation learns how it has been befooled, when it realizes how it has befooled itself, then the wholesome elements in the nation will emerge and will strike down the dominant party with execration and anathemas.

For this conclusion we can bide our time. Internal forces will work the necessary disruption so long as we make no feeble, no hasty, no inconclusive peace. It is no time to talk of peace yet, nor will it be for long. Humanity cannot afford to forego the gain to be derived from a struggle such as this, nor can it run the risk of having such an awful conflict ever repeated. Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation.

And, fortunately, the nations are united as never they have been before. So that a preparation is being made for friendly union among the nations of Europe, and ultimately for that federation of the world to which prophets have been long looking forward. Many horrors, much aerial fighting, will precede that time. Tennyson foresaw it all. You remember how he

Heard the heavens fill with shouting, and there rain'd a ghastly dew
From the nations' airy navies grappling in the central blue;
Till the war-drum throb'd no longer, and the battle-flags were furl'd
In the Parliament of man, the Federation of the world.

Yes, the federation of kindred and friendly nations, each with its own independent powers and aptitudes, its separate life and genius. So will our ideal of free institutions and self-respecting communities be fulfilled—that settled policy of free government

which has resulted in the loyal colonies and devoted daughter nations of the British Empire.

The result of the struggle will be ultimately wholesome for all the nations concerned, including Germany; for what will be defeated will not be Germany, but a miserably wrong-headed philosophy of life. The Germany to which we owe so much science and learning and art will be reborn; it will throw off the shackles of a cramping and overpowering despotism of evil.

While as to Belgium—I quote from a book by members of the Oxford Faculty of Modern History, called *Why We Are at War*:

Those who have hitherto known Belgium only as a hive of manufacturing and mining industry, or as a land of historic memories and monuments, are now recognizing, with some shame for their past blindness, the moral and spiritual qualities which her people have developed under the aegis of a European guarantee. It is now beyond dispute that, if Belgium were obliterated from the map of Europe, the world would be the poorer and Europe put to shame. The proofs which Belgium has given of her nationality will never be forgotten while liberty has any value or patriotism any meaning among men. . . . In fighting for Belgium we fight for the law of nations; that is, ultimately, for the peace of all nations and for the right of the weaker to exist.

ERRONEOUS AND MISLEADING THEORIES

The errors which are now supreme in Germany are: first, a glorification of war, based on a misreading of Darwinism; and, second, an enthronement of mere power, a belief in the immoral supremacy of the State.

Consider them for a moment. First, a misreading of Darwinism; a misunderstanding of the phrase "struggle for existence" as conducive to evolution, so that slaughter and active conflict seem the highest good. The Darwinian struggle is not of this order at all. It is a selection of the fittest to survive among a crowd of organisms which cannot possibly all survive; a selection of those most fitted to the environment. It is akin to the natural competition and effort with which we are all acquainted in peace-time; it is not like war at all. Moreover, in so far as there is savagery associated with it, Darwin himself, and Huxley, conspicuously in his Romanes Lecture, taught that this unconscious struggle ought not to apply to civilized humanity, whose business it was to contend against and dominate the cosmic process.

Since this matter is misunderstood by many people, and since Huxley's clear utterance on the subject is not so well known as it ought to be, I will make two quotations from his writings. In 1888 he wrote as follows:¹

... society differs from nature in having a definite moral object; whence it comes about that the course shaped by the ethical man—the member of society or citizen—necessarily runs counter to that which the non-ethical man—the primitive savage, or man as a mere member of the animal kingdom—tends to adopt. The latter fights out the struggle for existence to the bitter end, like any other animal; the former devotes his best energies to the object of setting limits to the struggle.

And in 1894 he developed the subject further, writing thus:

Men in society are undoubtedly subject to the cosmic process. As among other animals, multiplication goes on without cessation, and involves severe competition for the means of support. The struggle for existence tends to eliminate those less fitted to adapt themselves to the circumstances of their existence. The strongest, the most self-assertive, tend to tread down the weaker. But the influence of the cosmic process on the evolution of society is the greater the more rudimentary its civilization. Social progress means a checking of the cosmic process at every step and the substitution for it of another, which may be called the ethical process; the end of which is not the survival of those who may happen to be the fittest, in respect of the whole of the conditions which obtain, but of those who are ethically the best.

As I have already urged, the practice of that which is ethically best—what we call goodness or virtue—involves a course of conduct which, in all respects, is opposed to that which leads to success in the cosmic struggle for existence. In place of ruthless self-assertion it demands self-restraint; in place of thrusting aside, or treading down, all competitors, it requires that the individual shall not merely respect, but shall help his fellows; its influence is directed, not so much to the survival of the fittest as to the fitting of as many as possible to survive. It repudiates the gladiatorial theory of existence. It demands that each man who enters into the enjoyment of the advantages of a polity shall be mindful of his debt to those who have laboriously constructed it; and shall take heed that no act of his weakens the fabric in which he has been permitted to live. Laws and moral precepts are directed to the end of curbing the cosmic process and reminding the individual of his duty to the community, to the protection and

¹ These extracts may be read in the volume called *Evolution and Ethics* in the Eversley edition of Huxley's *Essays*, pages 203 and 81-83.

influence of which he owes, if not existence itself, at least the life of something better than a brutal savage. . . .

Let us understand, once for all, that the ethical progress of society depends, not on imitating the cosmic process, still less in running away from it, but in combating it.

The second error is the absolute enthronement of material power, the blasphemous notion that nothing higher than the State exists, and that there is no moral law, human or divine, to which the strongest State is subject; nothing above its own conception of what is beneficial to itself. Expediency becomes the supreme guide; all other considerations are signs of weakness and timidity; the sole national virtue is power to execute what it intends; the one fatal sin is deficiency of power. If any given State is supremely strong there exists no power above it; it is free to execute its own behests and to dominate and coerce the world.

It is this pernicious doctrine which has practically abrogated all international law; it is this which regards treaties as scraps of paper whenever they become inconvenient; this which has harried Belgium and intended to harry France and England with fire and sword. The theological doctrine of the crucial importance of right belief and of the damnation that follows wrong belief has never been so conspicuously illustrated. For these cruelties are not perpetrated out of mere viciousness, except, I suppose, by the miserable agents who lose their heads and become temporarily insane amid the unnatural license conferred upon them; no, these villainies are perpetrated as the outcome of an erroneous theory, a mistaken view of life, a miserably inadequate and essentially atheistic conception of the universe, and in pursuit of a blasphemous ideal.

All this is what must be overthrown; and so great is the importance of the final demonstration of its falsity that a heavy price is being paid for it, in suffering and death. In no other way could the conviction of error be so thoroughly burnt into the conscience of humanity.

And the conditions for the proof are sound. No one will be able to say that the German nation was weak, that it was caught unprepared, that it had not every advantage which the appliances and discoveries of the nineteenth century could grant it. In all adventitious and material ways it had immensely the advantage. It chose its own time, and it struck with vigor, determination, and enthusiasm. Only on the

spiritual, the immaterial side, was it deficient; and so the conscience of humanity has risen up against it, and it will be defeated.

This war is a veritable crusade, waged against the powers of evil, against a policy of lies, and of engineered and intentional brutality. The agents themselves, being men and not fiends, may sometimes have failed to execute to the full all the consequences of the abominable doctrine of their leaders; but enough has been done, and more, alas! will be done, to demonstrate their evil guidance.

If that view of life predominated, if the doctrine were successful that everything and anything was justified that seemed likely to strengthen the State, or to answer its immediate purpose, without any higher power dominating and redeeming the physical, then indeed hell would have come upon earth, and humanity would go down into the pit.

It may be that such a calamity is physically possible, but it must not be permitted. The whole strength of every enlightened nation and of every individual in the nation must combine to resist it. And if England is in the van, as it is in the forefront of the battle, if it draw upon itself, as it is doing, the hatred and fierce antagonism of the powers of evil, so much the more joyful and hopeful for the England of the future. It will come out of the struggle braced and invigorated and renewed in the spirit of its mind.

We needed this effort and this sacrifice of ease and prosperity, but the sinews of the nation are still sound. She has seen dark days before; indeed, as Emerson says, "*she has a kind of instinct that she sees a little better on a cloudy day.*"

And those who are young have the joy of taking part in the struggle, and will reap the fruits of the great national experience henceforth throughout their lives. Let them see to it that they make use of their opportunities and have nothing to regret when the trial is over, when victory supervenes and peace reigns once more. Other less obvious opportunities there will always be when these exceptional ones are gone—that is true—but lost opportunities never return.

I venture to say this also to those friendly nations which have hitherto remained neutral: Now is your opportunity for world service. Now are being laid the foundations of your future history.

OLIVER LODGE.